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SUBJECT: PRT GHAZNI: SIX MONTH REPORT ON SECURITY,
POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Security and governance in Ghazni have improved over the last six months due to an increase in troops and a change in governor. Reconstruction and development appear to be moving forward, but there is still no prioritized provincial development plan. Ghazni's citizens are experiencing greater optimism and higher expectations. However, given problems with provincial development and Governor Patan's threats to return to the U.S. if his operational funds are not soon released, it is unclear how long such optimism can be sustained. The next six months will be critical to keeping the momentum going in the right direction. END SUMMARY.

Security Situation

¶2. (SBU) In mid-2006, the increase in the number of Coalition/ISAF troops and offensive operations with the ANSF, as well as the dispersion of troops around Ghazni province forced the Taliban and other anti-government forces to leave the province or remain underground. Towards the end of 2006, the onset of winter further contributed to the reduction of anti-government attacks. IEDs and direct fire attacks continue but with less frequency.

¶3. (SBU) Police operations remain an issue. Under the leadership of former Governor Sher Alam, there was an aggressive effort to recruit and deploy 'arbakei,' or privately hired security forces. Many former militia men were hired as arbakei to supplement or replace police throughout problematic districts. It is believed that they were paid by Governor Sher Alam's operational funds. In the Summer of 2006 there was an effort to legitimize and formalize the arbakei by putting them under the control of regular ANP and paid by the MOI.

¶4. (SBU) When Sher Alam was replaced in September, most of the arbakei left with him. (Sher Alam had

tried to forestall his departure by threatening to take 'his' arbakei with him, leading some in the Coalition Forces (CF) to argue that his departure should be delayed.) Ultimately, the break-up of the undisciplined and corrupt arbakei proved a boost to security. Current efforts to supplement the police force with ANAP continue; however, there is some evidence that the ANAP vetting process was inadequate or incomplete, so there are undoubtedly some former arbakei with questionable loyalties in the ANAP.

15. (SBU) One source of the weakness of the ANP has been the revolving door at the office of the provincial police chief. In the last six months there have been four provincial chiefs of police. This has allowed corruption and inefficiency at the hands of other senior police officers to continue. The most recently appointed Chief of Police, Ali Sha Amendzai, appears to be the most honest of the bunch and is committed to rooting out corruption and corrupt police officials.

Governance and Development

16. (SBU) Under Sher Alam, all power was centralized in his office, and line ministers rarely met with the governor. Sher Alam appeared to regularly shuffle district administrators and district chiefs of police. In fact, in most districts the chief of police and the district administrator were the only government officials in power; they were

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thereby able to run their districts with little accountability. Sher Alam allowed Hazara Member of Parliament General Qasimi and his Hazara deputy governor to control the Hazara districts of Ghazni.

17. (SBU) While the PRT made efforts to get Sher Alam out to visit districts, those visits may have been counterproductive since he was widely seen as corrupt and inefficient. Sher Alam did not accept criticism from local elders and usually lectured district officials and residents about corruption and cooperation with the Taliban. With the replacement of Sher Alam by Governor Patan in September, things started to change. Governor Patan (who will only travel outside Ghazni City with CF protection) has more visibility in the districts than his predecessor. Over the past four months, he has become comfortable attending district shuras, acknowledging problems and accepting criticism from local citizens.

18. (SBU) With the arrival of Governor Patan, ministry directors seemed to become energized. The Provincial Development Council (PDC) now meets regularly and is developing lists of development needs. There is no prioritized list and it is unclear how needs will be prioritized. With mostly USG funding (CERP and USAID) development projects are proceeding. The lead time for project development and completion as well as the overwhelming needs will always disappoint local residents who are fond of saying "neither the government nor the international community has ever done anything for me."

19. (SBU) One chronic problem is the seemingly constant shuffling of district administrators and the lack of ministry representatives in most of the districts. Recent efforts to build district centers and improve security should allow more officials to reside in or regularly visit districts, but it will be difficult to convince those comfortable in Ghazni City to relocate.

Governor Patan seems to be placing more competent and honest people as district administrators. He is also reevaluating ministry representatives and the deputy governor and should be making changes in the coming months.

¶10. (SBU) In all areas of Ghazni the people's demands for development are consistent: water for drinking and irrigation, clinics, schools and roads. Most districts have clinics; the principal problem appears to be the lack of staff, especially female doctors, and medical supplies. Most schools do not have buildings and security concerns have made some schools, especially schools for girls, unable to operate. The USG building of retention dams should help increase the water available in the karess system, but the long term trend appears to be an ever-declining water table.

¶11. (SBU) Without contingency funds, Governor Patan has no way of financing additional security or local development. In September, he had discussed plans to collect tolls from local roads as a means of generating funds, but he did not want to turn the funds over to the central government. (Note: Such action would be illegal. End note.) It is currently unclear if and how these tolls are actually collected. If collected, there seems to be no consistency in location or frequency.

Economic Situation

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¶12. (SBU) Following a poor snowfall during last year's winter and heavy flooding this past August, weather conditions severely stunted growth in Ghazni's agricultural economy. Large snowfalls over the last three months, however, have generated optimism for the coming agricultural year. Ghazni City, areas along the Ring Road, and some Hazara areas of the province appear to be prosperous. The bazaars are well-stocked and there is building going on in most areas.

Cultural/Social Situation

¶13. (SBU) Schools were open in many parts of Ghazni. In some areas locals supplemented the salaries of teachers. Demand for education in all areas is strong. There is a lack of well-qualified teachers, supplies and school equipment. In Hazara areas the majority of girls attend school. In Pashtoon areas schooling of girls presents security problems and the priority for most families is educating their sons. In August, a local school headmaster was gunned down for his refusal to stop educating girls.

¶14. Ghazni has four female ministry directors: education; social services; health; and women's affairs. The director of education is well-qualified but does not appear to have a coherent provincial plan and may be replaced in the coming months. During the past six months, she has received several death threats, although it is unclear whether these threats were directed towards her because she is a woman or because she is Hazara.

¶15. (SBU) The Ghazni City Women's Center, with outside support, is active in literacy, English and computer training.

Prognosis

¶16. (SBU) Governor Patan says he's using the winter to plan reconstruction efforts and promises visible changes in Ghazni over the spring and summer. Such improvements would be enhanced if coupled with efforts to eliminate police corruption and if the ANSF has sufficient forces to mitigate the promised Taliban Spring offensive.

¶17. (SBU) Another uncertainty is how long Governor Patan will remain in Ghazni. A U.S. citizen, Governor Patan was already making plans to return to his family in the US, when he was tapped for the position in Ghazni. He has told the PRT that if his operational funds (not received for several months) do not start to flow by the Afghan new year (March 21), he will resign. In addition, it is unclear if the ongoing investigations by Attorney General Sabit into Patan's involvement in a land distribution deal in Khost Province (where he previously served as governor) will lead to charges against him that may force - or provide an opportunity for - him to quit. In Khost, Patan was accused of misappropriating public land that was designated for refugee resettlement.

18.(SBU) EMBASSY COMMENT: The budget presented to parliament does not contain a line item for governors' discretionary funds. There may be a small "operational" budget provided to governors for travel and representational expenses (\$5-7000/month) that will also have new accountability requirements. We will see if receipt of these funds will satisfy

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Governor Patan. END EMBASSY COMMENT.
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